

Splinters rehearse at the Old Canberra Brickworks.

Splinters at the Old Brickworks

By ANN NUGENT

SPLINTERS, the Canberra-based, avant-garde artists' group, is presenting its new show, *Whirled on a Fatal Floor*, at the Old Canberra Brickworks, on March 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Whirled on a Fatal Floor, "four times bigger than anything the group has attempted before", expands on themes explored in the group's earlier works — *Cry Stinking Fish* performed at Gorman House in 1987 and *Gumboot Full of Blood*, performed to high critical acclaim at the Adelaide Fringe Festival last year. Splinters' work focuses on existenialist angst and the possibility of finding meaning in the mazes of life.

The bizarre, the unexpected, the absurd and the shocking are the hallmarks of a Splinters production. In the past, Splinters' work has been sharp and cutting, and at times almost cruelly careless of the feelings of the audience. Now members say they have "grown up" and are consciously taking upon themselves, through their art, some of the pain of existence. At the end of the three-hour performance, it is the cast who will provide the sacrificial scapegoat.

Splinters has become more "audience friendly". A printed program, along the lines of Playbox, will contain tracts and poems from the show, bread will be baked and shared with the audience, fireworks exploded for their entertainment, and Splinters show bags distributed.

Splinters has often used disused houses or abandoned sheds for its shows. As performer David Branson says: "Splinters has a reverse garbage approach to set construction". The site for *Whirled on a Fatal Floor* covers a large area of open country around the dusty and decaying Old Brickworks at Yarralumla. The transformation of the vacant site has been made possible by a grant of $10,000 from CAPO and with the cooperation of the ACT Heritage Unit.

Environmental designer Ross Cameron has used the monumental features of the quarry's rockface as a back-drop to the village performance space, where one of the main sequences of the show occurs. Beyond, but out of sight, is a large lake, specially re-filled for the performance. The lake is the venue for another focal sequence. On the adjoining plain land, Cameron, Christo-like, has arranged three large, flying-fox curtains which will be gradually drawn aside to reveal further actions in the performance. Sections of the audience will be moved between the locales in carts which are being built in the brickworks workshops. Props including huge puppets, designed and constructed by Stuart Vaskess, are also being built on site.

Splinters is consciously theatre on the fringe. The core group sees itself as explorers who range beyond the bounds of established society. In a subversive

pioneers who range beyond the bounds of established society. In a subversive hit-and-run way, the group confronts its audiences with its "outside convention" discoveries, as well as questioning the socially endorsed ways of thinking. They work on what they call the "poetry principle". According to this principle performance statements, actions and images should provide the audience with opportunities of perceiving new possibilities and the power to freely act upon them.

In Splinters' perspective the ultimate crime is to permit an audience to be passive spectators. Intellectual and physical involvement is part and parcel of a Splinters production. In *Whirled on a Fatal Floor* the spectators are initially divided into three groups. The voyeurs situated high up on a hillside, are provided with viewing glasses to observe the spectacle of life. Below are two other audience groups, the objective and subjective participants, who are engaged in on-ground life struggles. As no single audience group can see all the action at any given time the narrative line gives way to a cosmic dimension.

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